



8

I WILL ARISE AND GO TO MY FATHER

‘In short, all the miseries which we endure are a profitable invitation to repentance’ (John Calvin).

‘But when he came to himself, he said, “How many of my father’s hired servants have more than enough bread, but I perish here with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and I will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you’”’ (Luke 15:17-18).

I remember driving down the winding roads of South Louisiana, under the canopy of Live Oaks and moss and cypress trees, on both sides banked by swamp. I was making sales calls on oil wells down there. The driving gave me a lot of time to think. I was thinking that my life was a long way from the faith that Aunt Eva had prayed for me. The days of hearing her teaching, bowing with her hand on my head, seemed like a sweet but far away dream. During these days I listened to Christian radio. I would hear D. James Kennedy, Charles Stanley, Charles Swindoll, J. Vernon McGee, and others (including some outside of the pale of orthodoxy). I became burdened about being in





WHAT GOD STARTS, GOD COMPLETES

the hog pen of life. I wanted to return to the Father's House. But how?

During one of my sales calls on a Tuesday morning in Morgan City, Louisiana, I was so burdened that I had to find a minister or someone to express my heart to and to find the way home. I was thinking about how my life was so messed up and how Aunt Eva had taught me better, when all of a sudden I came across a sign: 'Morning Prayer at 10:30 on Tuesdays.' It was a small Episcopal church. I did not think twice. I pulled over, and like a man rushing into the emergency room, I rushed into that church! I paused, caught my breath, and took in the scene. In this small, rather ordinary looking sanctuary, there was the vicar, what I assumed was his wife, one other lady (a rather older woman), and me. I sat down in my own pew. The liturgy started. I had never been in an Episcopal church before, and while the 'ups and downs' were different to me, I could hear the Bible in the Morning Prayer service. Between the sonorous voice of this small-town vicar, talking a bit louder than usual to drown out the coughing of the window air conditioner unit, and my own thoughts condemning me, I came to understand that I was a sinner. In fact, I will always remember his text:

'And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me' (Matt. 10:38).

I did not completely understand, at that moment, what it meant to take up the cross. I did not fully understand or assent to what the cross of Christ meant. I knew that I was far from God, but I did not know how far until that service. I was not following Jesus Christ, that was for certain. So those few words, read by the minister that day, cut deep into my soul like a surgeon's knife. The words exposed my spiritual condition. I believe the Holy Spirit, on that morning, showed me my sin. But I still had far to go to get home.





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Sometimes we think of the conversion experience as a single occurrence, happening all at once – a man sees his sin, repents of it, and comes to the Lord. That happens. But it also happens, especially with covenant children, that we see our sin, desire forgiveness, and seek it over time through repentance, faith, and trust in the finished work of Jesus Christ. This is what happened to me. It is also what happened in Jesus' story about the lost boy.

'When he came to his senses, he said, "How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men'"' (Luke 15:17-19 NIV).

You can see the situation: the lost boy is tired of the sad story of his life. He is tired of the hog pods. He wants home, and he wonders about his father. He has a poor understanding of his father's love, for this boy says, 'Make me like one of your hired hands.' In other words, 'I will do whatever it takes to come home.' Have you ever been gone from your home for a long time and you longingly sighed, almost with tears in your eyes, and moaned, 'I just want to go home.' 'Home' has such a ring to it. That is what I desired so much. 'Home' was the place where the Word of God healed me, where God was near, where Christ was real to me, where I was not under the wrath of God but under His mercy.

I had wasted so much, and I had infected so many other people with my sin. There was no time to waste. I had to go home. When I say this, I am saying that immediately I began to take steps to get home – as if I could make that trip in my own strength, and as if I really knew the way home. I didn't. But I rushed forward. I not only smelled like a hog pen, if you will – that is, my sin in my life and in my relationships was still so much a part of me – but I even scooped up the





WHAT GOD STARTS, GOD COMPLETES

pods and slop and brought it with me. 'I had decided to follow Jesus' as the little song goes. But that decision was still filled with a fleshly understanding of who I was and who God is and how I could get to Him.

The way home, for me, took many winding paths. It started with religion. That is the way it works for desperate refugee sons seeking asylum from the consequences of sin. But is trading the 'far country' for a 'negotiated peace' really how to know His grace?

